

Safety net fares well (ish) in city, county budget proposals

STAFF REPORTS

Portland and Multnomah County each release their draft budgets for the coming, continuing support for most safety net programs for housing and homeless.

However, the proposals aren't without some cutbacks, reflecting tough financial pressures from local, state and federal sources.

Multnomah County's \$1.5 billion proposed budget includes some trimmings to manage a \$3.5 million funding gap, but for the most part retains support for vital social services.

Managing budget gaps is nothing new for the county, now in its 12th straight year of cuts and adjustments to accommodate declining revenues. But even with the cuts, that include laying off 70 full-time positions, safety net services for the county's poor and homeless families remain largely intact.

Here's what's being proposed:

■ Short-term rent assistance helps individuals at risk of becoming homeless to maintain their housing. The budget preserves the current funding level at about \$500,000 in one-time money for the program.

■ The Rapid Re-Housing Initiative and Action for Prosperity programs provide assistance to individuals and families who have become homeless. These programs, funded at a combined \$520,000, helped 130

families in need of housing this fiscal year.

■ SUN Schools wrap services and support program around schools to help homeless and impoverished families. The proposed budget includes \$144,000 in expanded funding for the SUN Schools model, which includes after-school homework support, parenting classes, and enrichment programs to help struggling students. The additional funding will help bring health and social services for at-risk, school-aged children to Wilkes, Prescott and Highland Elementary schools in the Reynolds, Parkrose and Barlow school districts.

Also included in the budget is shelter and support services to victims of commercial sexual exploitation of children, downtown dental services for low-income Portland residents, and the opening of the southeast health clinic at the Southeast Health Center in Portland to provide comprehensive primary care services that include acute and chronic illness treatment, family planning and prenatal services.

(The proposed county budget includes \$30,000 to pay for the publication and distribution of the Rose City Resource, a separate project from Street Roots' newspaper.)

To offset the funding gap, the county proposes cutting 70 full time jobs: 1.5 percent of its work force. The library is taking the biggest hit in those cuts, losing

47 full time positions. Also, all management employees and most union-represented employees have taken cost-of-living freezes, or complete pay freezes in either 2012 or 2013. In this year's budget, this represents about \$6.4 million in salary savings that is invested directly in services.

The current \$3.5 million funding gap traces back to the usual suspects: the housing market bust, the lagging economy and unemployment. However, even with some stabilization in the marketplace, Multnomah County Budget Director Karyne Kieta says the gap is projected to grow between \$1 million and \$3.9 million per year for the next five years.

The city's safety net for low-income and homeless individuals takes a \$700,000 hit in the mayor's proposed budget, with an additional 6 percent cut in overall program funding for the Portland Housing Bureau. The bureau's total budget request was \$91.5 million.

Mayor Sam Adams is proposing allocating \$4.1 million out of the requested \$4.8 million in one-time money for housing and homeless programs. The biggest cut was the \$500,000 proposed for homeownership programs. Fish, who oversees the Portland Housing Bureau, has said he will work with partners to secure the full funding.

The one-time allocation was the subject of a campaign by Street Roots, JOIN, Oregon Opportunity Network, the Community

Alliance of Tenants and others.

Safety net survivors in the city's budget include:

■ \$1.7 million for Short Term Rent Assistance to keep families in their homes, and help people who have fallen into homelessness quickly find a home.

■ \$1.7 million for shelter and emergency services that offer a safe, warm escape from the street, including winter shelter.

■ \$456,300 for information and referral services such as the 211info hotline and Street Roots' Rose City Resource guide, as well as services for low-income families facing discrimination or unsafe housing conditions, or struggling to find a home.

■ \$185,000 to fund operations at Bud Clark Commons, which houses a day center, overnight shelter and permanent supportive housing for people getting off the streets.

The 6 percent reduction from ongoing General Fund support totals about \$385,000 in program cuts.

Both the city and county are experiencing cuts in state and federal funding streams, and the city's leading funding source for affordable housing — tax increment financing — declines rapidly in the coming years.

Both budgets will have public hearings through the month of May, with votes scheduled for the end of the month.

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